

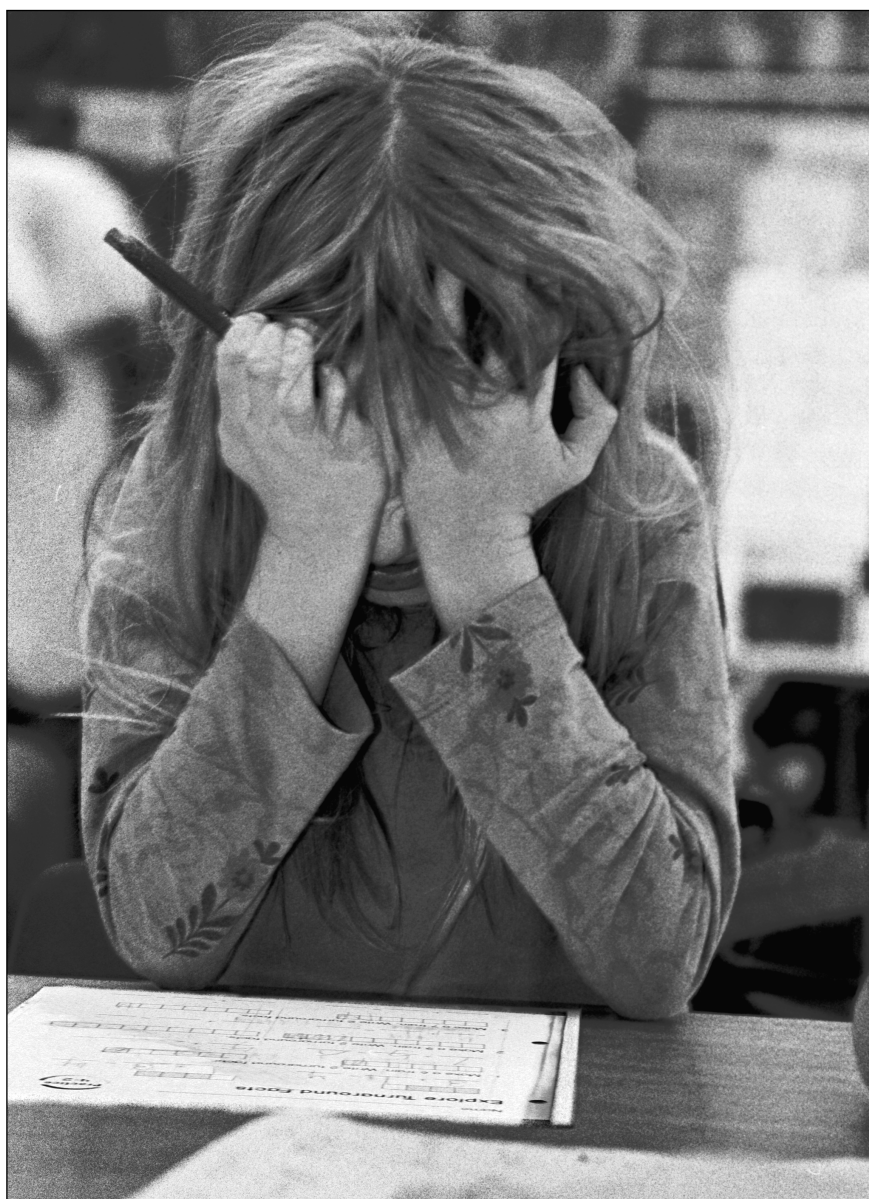
# A Pedagogy of Control: Worksheets and the Special Needs Child

*A worksheet-driven curriculum violates the literacy rights and learning potential of special needs children.*

Mellinee Lesley

Four years ago, I began a case study of a three-year-old child, "Amanda," who attended a public preschool program for "developmentally delayed" children. This child was placed into a preschool for special needs children because of speech problems identified through a battery of developmental tests as generalized articulation needs, language-based deficits, and a fine motor delay. By the end of two years of preschool, Amanda had made little progress in her speech development and through further testing was diagnosed with a speech disability and cognitive abilities that placed her in the "mildly mentally retarded" range. Thus, Amanda qualified for full special education services and modifications in every academic area. Through kindergarten screening, Amanda was found to need speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy, and so Amanda was placed in a self-contained special education classroom for kindergarten and first grade.

I began to work with Amanda because of my connection to her family and my curiosity about the diagnostic placement and remediation mechanisms in public education that identify "special needs" children at a young age in hopes that early intervention will result in the prevention



of school failure. I observed her occasionally in her classroom settings, interviewed her teachers about her progress and their classroom pedagogy, and analyzed the schoolwork she brought home. I also tutored Amanda two to three evenings a week at her home during the school year. In her home setting, Amanda and I read and wrote together. I engaged Amanda in read-alouds, various forms of shared reading where we read a text simultaneously, and guided reading where I assisted Amanda in reading independently (Pinnell & Fountas, 1994). We also spent time writing together in a variety of formats, including journal writing, independent letter writing, interactive letter writing where we took turns composing a common text, and message writing to one another. Our work together was driven by Amanda's interests and requests. She selected the books we read from her own collection of texts, she determined how we read the books together, and she determined how she wanted to respond in writing to both the texts of our readings and our daily lives.

When we began working together, Amanda would often scribble notes to her family members and me. Before Amanda started kindergarten, she was able to write her name and create meaningful messages through scribble writing and drawings. On two occasions during her two years of preschool, Amanda brought home dictated language experience approach writing. The majority of her schoolwork, as evidenced by the papers she brought home, consisted of duplicated worksheets.

Once Amanda began kindergarten, she experienced a huge setback in her sense of self as a writer. By October of her kindergarten year, she stated that she couldn't write her name and that she needed me to

hold the pencil for her in order to try. During our tutoring sessions, Amanda stopped writing; she had been severely influenced by the socializing force of the school curriculum that equated the standard formation of letters with an ability to write. A year later, in her first-grade year, I was able to engage her in journal writing and writing letters to Santa Claus. Slowly, Amanda, who had been eager to write at an early age, became interested again in writing.

### **A WORKSHEET-DRIVEN CURRICULUM**

Not long into the first year of preschool, I realized that, with very few exceptions, the only type of work Amanda dutifully carted home week after week was an assortment of mass-produced worksheets. At first, the worksheets were simply outlines of pictures the children were instructed to color while staying within the lines. These pictures of apples, clowns, and insects seemed innocuous at first. Later, through observation and discussions with Amanda's parents and teachers, I realized that these worksheets comprised the majority of her literacy curriculum. This trend continued in kindergarten where the children learned a letter of the alphabet each week and completed worksheets focused on correct letter

letter of the week, isolated phonics instruction, and copying sentences from the board.

Two important differences between Amanda's first-grade experience and the prior three years were pen pal letters with college students and journal writing. Unfortunately, these experiences were sporadic and limited. For instance, the classroom aide largely composed the writing Amanda did with her pen pal. Similarly, at the end of the school year, Amanda brought home a journal with a total of only 74 entries. These brief experiences with writing were good for Amanda, but she still exhibited a great deal of hesitation about writing and a sense of helplessness, both at home and at school. Thanks to the amount of reading Amanda's family did with her and an emphasis on literature in her classroom settings, Amanda did not experience the same setbacks in her perception of herself as a reader.

Since her first introduction into the world of worksheets, Amanda has mastered the daily ritual, rules, expectations, and outcomes required to complete the reams of worksheets that greet her each day. One morning, I observed Amanda completing a series of worksheets on beginning consonant sounds (the letter-of-the-week curriculum from kindergarten refashioned for first

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formation. I wondered why the school offered Amanda so little exposure to language experience activities and no exposure to journal writing, message boards, or interactive writing. In first grade, a similar trend emphasized worksheets, a

grade by adding more worksheets and a phonics emphasis). I was a little concerned at first by Amanda's behavior. She was fidgety and distracted by the children around her. She also appeared to be haphazardly cutting and pasting pieces from the

bottom of one worksheet to the top of the page. Initially, I mistook her apparent lack of concentration as confirmation of hyperactivity and poor fine motor skills (both concerns identified by her teachers since preschool).

However, when I ventured across the room, I discovered that Amanda had completed the worksheets correctly, albeit sloppily. Since I had never observed her to be so fidgety at home, I suspected that Amanda was bored. After all, her literacy development had long since surpassed the requirements of the worksheet: following directions, matching sounds to pictures, cutting and pasting pictures to corresponding sounds, and coloring pictures with appropriate colors (see Figure 1). How would such low-level skills address the processes of Amanda's literacy development? Where could she progress from this point? Masses of worksheets completed in isolation were never going to teach Amanda to read or develop language arts skills or find her voice as a learner or write, arguably the most complex aspect of human literacy (Avery, 1993; Calkins, 1994).

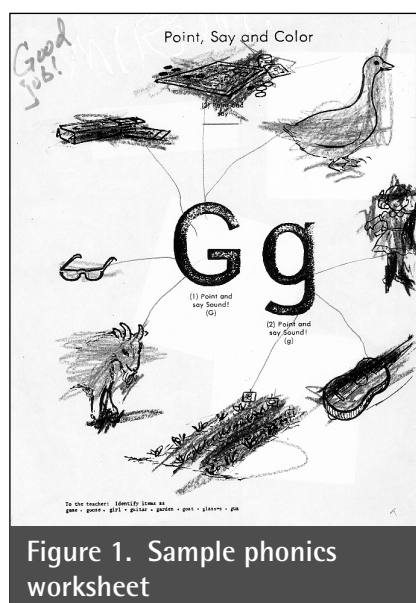


Figure 1. Sample phonics worksheet

Unfortunately, Amanda's early educational experiences are not unique. Richard Anderson reported in 1985 that thousands of children across the United States are subjected to a worksheet-driven curriculum, completing approximately 1000 worksheets in a year's time. If Amanda's experience is typical, little has changed in public education since 1985. The fact that there is no correlation between a child's literacy acquisition and the completion of these low-level, sub-skill drills is ignored by school districts clamoring to standardize emergent literacy pedagogy under the guise of synthetic phonics programs. For some reason, schools like the one Amanda attends believe that effective phonics instruction can be translated into worksheets. There is no proof that worksheets as a method for teaching literacy translate into children's successful acquisition of phonics skills (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Dougherty Stahl, 1998). Rather, research supports the application of skills to authentic texts (Strickland, 1998; Cunningham, 2000; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998).

At this point in American public educational history, worksheets have enjoyed a long run as the mainstay of thousands of school districts' literacy curricula. Textbook companies manufacture workbooks with pages that can be detached and photocopied. Prescriptive phonics programs, driven by a reliance on worksheets, are presented as a panacea. The problem is that while American educators are spending millions of dollars purchasing and reproducing worksheet pages, there is no research that supports the transference of children's successful performance filling out worksheets to their ability to read and compose text (Anderson, 1985; Avery, 1993; Calkins, 1994).

## DEVELOPMENTAL APPROPRIATENESS OF WORKSHEETS

More disturbing than wasted resources and lost instructional time is the evidence suggesting that extensive use of worksheets actually hinders the acquisition of literacy for all children, not just special needs children like Amanda (Pinnell & Fountas, 1994; Dickinson & DiGisi, 1998). There are several reasons why reliance on worksheets debilitates young children's literacy development. The primary reason is that worksheets are developmentally inappropriate. Thus, worksheets are extremely limiting and confusing to children who are emerging in their literacy skills. For children like Amanda, who are recognized as developmentally delayed or identified as having special needs, the confusion is even greater. Yet, too often, worksheet-driven curricula are the mainstay of programs for these populations of children (Zucker, 1998; Scala, 1993).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education released a joint statement (NAEYC, 1990) that clearly admonishes the use of developmentally inappropriate curriculum with children in preschool and the primary elementary grades. Given the individual nature of child development, the NAEYC report cautions against universal curriculum for young children and states that pedagogy must respect children's physical needs. According to the report, "In appropriate programs children are not required to sit and attend to paperwork or listen to adult lectures for extended periods of time" (p. 5). In essence, a worksheet-driven curriculum where children spend the majority of their time sit-

ting at their desks completing worksheets is not biologically appropriate for young children.

Through working with Amanda, I have observed several developmental problems with using worksheets for children with special needs in addition to the concerns raised in the NAEYC report. While I focus on

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worksheets and the special needs child, I would argue that many of these reasons relate to the use of worksheets with any young child.

1. The scale of the print on worksheets and the scale of the spaces allotted for children with fine motor delays to "write" are too small. Amanda struggled incessantly with trying to write letters small enough to fit on lines and in blanks. A child's appropriate scale in reading and writing ability can be determined by asking a child to write his/her name on a plain piece of paper and measure the size of the capital letter. Even if the child's writing still resembles scribble writing, the size of that child's formations needs to be matched to the size of all print placed in front of him/her to read. Similarly, spaces for writing need to be large enough to accommodate the child's fine motor scale.
2. Text instructions on worksheets are typically too small and complex for special needs children to decode without teacher assistance. The instructions on worksheet pages are teacher oriented. Because the worksheets are mass-produced, there is no way for the companies creating these products to individualize the language on the worksheets. Consequently, the language used in worksheets does not allow connections to words the child has already mastered, words the child knows from his/her individual life contexts, or phonetic links to words the child is learning (decodable words for the child).
3. Instructions on worksheets that children cannot read or understand without lots of teacher explanation foster a sense of learned helplessness. Children internalize a belief system about learning that is predicated upon a sense of not being able to learn without the teacher telling the child what to do. This phenomenon is especially devastating for special needs populations who have already been labeled with deficits and marginalized academically.
4. Children are expected to work in isolation to complete a worksheet. This practice greatly undermines children's needs for social interaction as a catalyst for learning (Vygotsky, 1986). Literacy development in particular is a socially mediated process. Young children and special needs children in emergent stages of literacy acquisition require meaningful social contexts to master literacy skills and strategies. Isolated work does not offer these important experiences.
5. There is only one correct way to complete a worksheet. Children are not rewarded for their natural curiosity and individual explorations. For example, children are punished for reading "pan" for "pot" even though the picture cue is identical. These types of arbitrary distinctions can be extremely impractical and confusing for special needs children.
6. Concepts covered in worksheets are devoid of any sort of "real" literacy context. The worksheets do not grow out of ideas children encounter in reading or writing either independently or collectively. Contextualized links for special needs children are important, especially if the child is operating in a highly concrete stage of development.
7. The expectations for precision instead of approximation exploit the tendency for young children to over-focus on accuracy and sets up their belief that they cannot be successful in reading/writing because they cannot get the worksheet exactly right. This expectation for special needs children can exacerbate confusion and hinder progress.
8. Worksheets are boring. Little neurological development is taking place in children's minds when they are completing dull, rote activities (Bruner & Kenny, 1966; Hannaford, 1995; Davis, 1997; Jones, 1995; Wolfe & Brandt, 1998). Special needs children need to experience cognitively stimulating learning environments. Additionally, interest in learning activities is essential for students identified with learning disabilities or special needs to maintain focus on the details of a complex literacy task.
9. Worksheets are mass produced. There is no possible way for worksheets to take into account children's individual interests, life experiences, or contexts for learning. Consequently, worksheets are often biased in favor of a mainstream, white perspective (Nieto, 1999).
10. Too often, worksheets are sent home. The family time spent deciphering worksheets undermines time spent in authentic family literacy learning that occurs at home. Additionally, many phonics worksheets that require strict coding of

such linguistic elements as breves, macrons, and accents are foreign to family literacy knowledge and processes. Consequently, many parents cannot assist their children with their homework unless the teacher supplies photocopies of the teacher's guide with answers.

11. Worksheets are designed for children to practice skills (particular to the format of worksheets) they need to have already learned in order to complete the worksheet. As such, children who are able to successfully complete the worksheet learn no new strategies or techniques by doing them. Consider Amanda's boredom and developmental stagnation in completing a worksheet. Worksheets that are easy for special needs children do not advance their literacy development; they only waste valuable learning time.

## PEDAGOGIES OF CONTROL

Worksheets are not only developmentally inappropriate for special needs children, they also undermine teachers' professional decision-making processes under the guise of standardization. Although packaged and promoted as the best way to implement explicit phonics programs for struggling readers/writers, worksheets actually interfere with effective instruction for special needs children for the following reasons:

1. Worksheets confine teachers to a pedagogy of rote learning instead of fostering dynamic teaching practices that are essential for special needs children.
2. Worksheets do not give teachers a meaningful form of literacy assessment. Thus, the teacher only knows when a child has successfully followed the directions on a worksheet, not where the child is in his/her applied literacy development. Match-

ing letters on a worksheet does not tell a teacher whether or not a child can read those same letters when encountered within the text of a book (Clay, 1993; Cunningham, 2000). With special needs children, in particular, Clay (1993) warns that "standardized tests do not measure slow progress well" (p. 6).

3. Worksheets are designed to control not only the learning behaviors of students but also the teaching practices of teachers. Worksheet-driven literacy programs are often adopted by school districts with low standardized test scores and teachers who are teaching on waivers or are otherwise characterized as being professionally underprepared. "Teacher proof" programs promise administrators that all children will be successful if a teacher reads the script and follows the directions on the worksheet. Somewhat ironically, teachers' behaviors are controlled just as much as students' behaviors through worksheet-laden programs. Thus, controlling and being controlled become one in the same phenomena.

Given the problematic nature of worksheets with young children, why do so many school districts persist in using them? The answer is simple: it seems safe to teach in this manner. Worksheets give teachers a sense of security about "covering" information that they feel their students need to learn. Worksheets also provide quick and tangible evidence that children have "mastered" the concepts the teacher deems important. Additionally, worksheets simplify assessment measures. Worksheets take seconds to evaluate and translate easily into grades to show to parents. Finally, worksheets offer curricular simplicity in terms of classroom management. Children who sit quietly in their seats, work in isolation, and complete their work

make it easier for teachers to manage their classrooms and administrators to manage their schools.

Control is the dominant objective of a curriculum that is driven by worksheets. And although some might assume this method of teaching is easy for the teacher, my experience in working with teachers in a variety of professional development settings belies this assumption. Teachers are often frustrated by this way of teaching and rely on worksheets only because they do not know how else to teach given the pressure to follow standardized curriculum mandates.

For special education teachers, worksheets hold an additional allure because they appear to give special needs children self-control; they present "manageable" tasks. However, in the case of a child like Amanda, I argue that manageability should not replace learning as the primary concern in determining pedagogy. In fact, more consideration should be given to the ways worksheet tasks *restrict* the learning of Amanda and other special needs children.

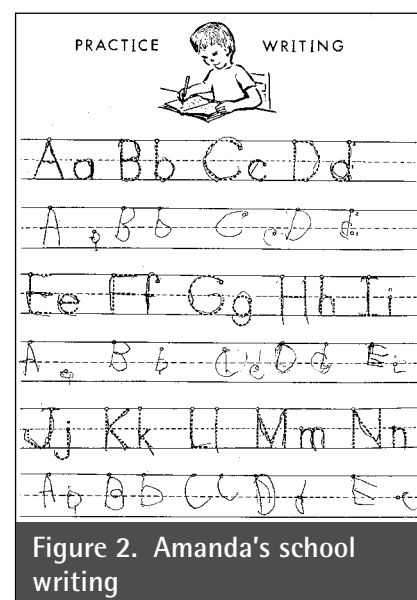


Figure 2. Amanda's school writing

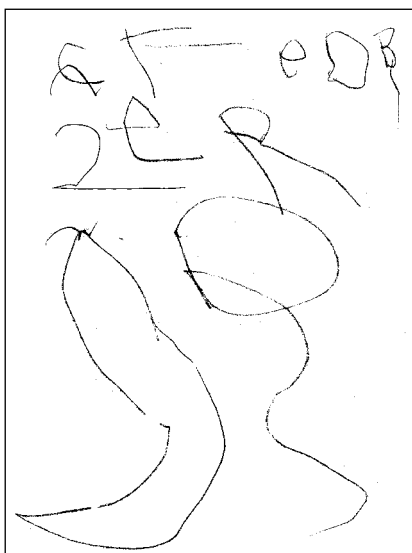


Figure 3. Amanda's home journal writing

In February, 2001, I collected two writing samples, one from Amanda's school writing and one from her home journal. Figure 2 is an example of the letter formation writing practice Amanda was receiving in school as independent writing instruction. In this example, Amanda's writing development was measured solely by the mastery of letter formations. Note Amanda's confusion with completing the worksheet correctly. By comparison, examine Amanda's writing about her favorite animals, a giraffe and a zebra, from her home journal (Figure 3). Note the scale of her print in this sample as compared to the required scale on the worksheet sample. Note also Amanda's emerging phonemic awareness.

In comparing these two writing samples, I am struck by the difference in Amanda's sense of purpose and audience in each task. Primarily, I am struck by the difference between using writing to communicate and learn in her journal and using writing to repeat and practice letter formations on the worksheet. Correct letter formation as an aspect of writ-

ing instruction is a manageable task. As such, control over writing is given primacy in the worksheet.

Four years of observing Amanda lose her "literacy rights" (IRA Position Statement, 2000)—ever since the tender age of three—has been disheartening to say the least. What would teachers, administrators, and families do without worksheets? Teach children to read and write using real texts is an obvious response. Instead, though, the dominating literacy instruction in American schools consists of teachers dumping their literacy instruction into the completion of a limited "literacy" task that arises in school settings and is rarely, if ever, mimicked in authentic settings.

Unfortunately, when we continue to perpetuate pedagogies predicated upon control as opposed to pedagogies attuned to learning and the developmental complexities of young children, we lose the opportunity to facilitate emergent literacy. We are so busy indoctrinating children with "guess-the-correct-answer" games that we cease to recognize children's emerging literacy skills.

Pedagogies of control are hallmarked by a prevalence of worksheets, but they also extend to classroom routines and inappropriate student mandates. For instance, at Amanda's school, first-grade children were not allowed to speak to one another during lunch. Teachers, aides, and cafeteria staff constantly policed the cafeteria scolding children, blowing whistles, and imposing time outs on children who spoke too much. On one occasion, I observed the children seated around Amanda during lunch engaged in a wonderful literacy dialogue. One little girl pointed to Amanda's juice and announced that she could read the label (environmental print). After she read the label, a little boy

across the table stated that he could spell the words "dog" and "cat." The literacy exchange continued among the four children until a teacher's aide chided the children for speaking to one another. Not only were these children engaged in a meaningful literacy event, they were also practicing language skills. Giving young children opportunities to speak to one another in unstructured settings is critical for their language arts and literacy development (Machado, 1999). "Sometimes speech becomes of such vital importance that, if not permitted to use it, young children cannot accomplish the given task" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 26).

## ALTERNATIVES TO WORKSHEETS

What would the literacy curriculum look like in a self-contained special education classroom setting if we did not rely on worksheets? In the case of a special needs child like Amanda, I argue that the curriculum should mimic the same rich literacy experiences that are typically reserved for regular classroom settings. My work with Amanda suggests that demonstrating reading and writing processes and strategies through authentic tasks with reading literature and writing notes/stories accelerates special needs children's literacy development.

Amanda and I read lots of children's literature together during our sessions, primarily through the simple ritual of taking turns reading (repeated reading). I also supported Amanda's progression into independent reading by reading aloud to her, reading simultaneously with her, and listening to her read independently. Amanda determined the extent to which she needed my support in reading based on the difficulty of the text. She also determined who would read first. Thus, not only was she self-selecting her

reading material, she was also self-monitoring the amount of instructional support she needed.

We also spent a great deal of time talking about what we were reading together. One evening while reading an alphabet book with a single word text printed on each page, I prompted Amanda with questions like “How can you figure that word out?” for the words she didn’t know, and “How did you figure that word out?” for the words she was able to read. The importance of these simple questions is that they invited Amanda to develop strategies for reading that are applied to real texts. And, they invited Amanda to learn new strategies for reading.

When we first began working together, Amanda primarily read the pictures of the texts. Slowly, as we spent time looking at the titles of the books we were reading and finding those same words in the text of the books, Amanda began to pay careful attention to the words that comprised the texts. We then looked at the graphophonemic patterns that comprised the words and made links to other words that had similar patterns. In addition to talking about word-level reading strategies, Amanda and I spent time talking about the broader meaning of the texts. I realized that Amanda had internalized this process when she told me that reading with me meant “reading books, talking about them, and reading more books.”

I began our writing adventures through a great deal of demonstrating. During Amanda’s kindergarten year, she had become extremely self-conscious about her writing ability. She no longer delighted in the crumpled up “important” messages she had scrawled and placed ceremoniously into the palm of my hand as a preschooler. So, I focused on modeling writing with her. I wrote her

quirky messages that would consist of a text like, “Dear Amanda, What did you do at recess today? I took a nap today. That was my recess. Love, Mellinee.”

I also demonstrated journal writing at the end of each session. I bought two identical red journals, wrote my name on one and Amanda’s name on the other, and tucked Amanda’s journal away for the right moment. I wrote in my journal and waited for Amanda’s curiosity to lead her to this activity. Finally, after watching me write at the end of our sessions on several occasions, she asked me if she could write in my journal, too. I said “no” because this was my journal and quickly asked her if she would like her own. She responded enthusiastically, so I presented her with her own red journal with her name already written on it. This began her adventure with writing in a space that was reserved solely for her experimentation. Although she was working dutifully at school on letter formation, Amanda wrote in this journal largely with scribble writing. She went back to the stage of writing development she had been in prior to her devastation in kindergarten.

From the journal writing, I engaged Amanda in writing letters (e.g., to Santa Claus and to her grandmother) and introduced interactive writing through making a birthday wish list, more letter writing, and writing stories. Finally, I engaged Amanda in making books, her most treasured written creations.

By the end of the year, Amanda was becoming independent in her literacy learning as a reader and

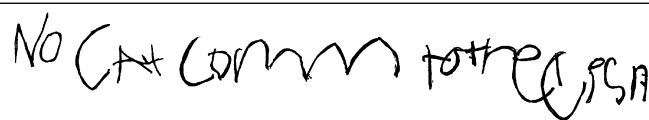


Figure 4. Amanda’s home message writing

as a writer. Figure 4 is a writing sample of spontaneous home writing Amanda completed at the end of the year. In this writing sample, Amanda decided to tape a message to her cat on the patio door to warn her against entering the kitchen. The message read, “No cat come to the kitchen.” These examples of reading and writing underscore the importance of patiently attending to the nuances in the developmental process of literacy acquisition for special needs children.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Too often, special needs children like Amanda are the recipients of extremely controlled, developmentally inappropriate pedagogy. Denny Taylor (1991) captured this phenomena in her case study of Patrick, a child the school district wanted to “code” for special education. While Amanda’s situation is not identical to Patrick’s, the curriculum, labeling, and limited assessments are quite reminiscent of Patrick’s experiences. School districts that identify students as requiring special education services benefit by receiving additional federal and state financial support.

The good news about Amanda is that through supplemental work in reading and writing outside of school, she concluded first grade reading independently at an early first-grade level and reading instructionally at a middle first-grade level. Her teacher stated that Amanda could read at a pre-primer level. Amanda’s speech has im-

## Worksheet Alternatives: Computer-Mediated Interactive Practice

The classroom computer offers an alternative to paper/pencil worksheets for educators who want to give children practice in literacy skills. Online interactive games and multimedia screen tools can present a special environment for children's computer-mediated learning. This selected sample of online resources includes many assistive, multimedia features (visual effects, animations, sound effects, or speech feedback) that can support children's ability to benefit from on-screen skills practice. These resources furnish varying degrees of feedback to support self-correction. Additionally, unlike worksheet exercises, young children find many of these interactive games to be motivating and engaging.

- Kids Domain <http://www.kidsdomain.com/games/index.html> is a site that offers various interactive resources, including FunSchool Games <http://www.funschool.com/games.php>. This site includes a col-

lection of games and online activities that are available for preschool and Grades K–6, such as matching games for identifying letters and learning key word referents and rhyming games.

- LearningPlanet.com <http://www.learningplanet.com/act/fl/aact/index.asp> offers a free trial and a modest annual fee for teachers who find this site useful in meeting their students' needs. The site includes simple games such as Mister Elephant's Memory Game, an updated version of the old concentration matching game.
- *Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators* at <http://discovery.school.com/schrockguide/> offers links to several sites that present interactive games involving literacy skills, such as sites for online crossword puzzles and wacky web tales using parts of speech.

—Linda D. Labbo

proved as she has learned to read. In fact, she is able to clarify her spoken words through spelling them (largely through invented spelling) to listeners who do not quite grasp what she is saying. She also cues her speech through reading written words and articulating phonemes correctly. And, Amanda's interest in writing is blossoming.

The truly sobering question is where could children like Amanda be in their literacy acquisition if their kindergarten teachers and first-grade teachers had utilized more meaningful techniques predicated upon authentic writing and reading tasks? What messages are we teaching special needs children about literacy when they spend the preponderance of their time circling words on worksheets devoid of any meaningful context? Clearly, much

more research on the literacy acquisition of developmentally delayed and special needs children needs to be collected.

My observations of Amanda suggest special needs children are capable of much more literacy development than a worksheet-driven curriculum requires. Consequently, we need to ask ourselves how literacy development fits into the curriculum presented to special needs children. We need to question the types of reading and writing goals that are included in the Individualized Educational Plans of special needs children to insure that these goals are predicated upon developmentally appropriate literacy instruction as opposed to easily measured but isolated skill drills. Until we imagine emergent literacy pedagogies for special needs children that are not

centered on highly controlled, reductive tasks such as worksheets, we will forever be at risk of violating their literacy rights and limiting their potential for literacy acquisition as a result of developmentally inappropriate practices.

Prior to summer vacation at the end of Amanda's first-grade year, I took her on an excursion to the public library. Before we arrived, Amanda announced that she was going to check out "one hundred books!" Then she giggled and said, "No, one hundred and *one* books!" During the course of the year, Amanda had read over one hundred books with me. Although she spent days completing worksheets at school, through her home literacy experiences and tutorial sessions we managed to provide Amanda with alternative literacy models.

I am reminded of Calkins's (1994) caution that "our teaching matters more than we ever dreamed possible" (p. 517). This is especially true for special needs children. Every method is a critical juncture between making progress, not making progress, and regression. Even something so "simple" as a worksheet can make this difference.

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## Author Biography

**Mellinee Lesley** was assistant professor of reading/literacy education at Eastern New Mexico University and is now at Texas Tech University.

## Call for Manuscripts for *More Ways to Handle the Paper Load—on Paper and Online*

The NCTE Books Program invites original essays for a sequel to *How to Handle the Paper Load* (NCTE, 1979). Because handling the paper load continues to be a challenge—one to which electronic technologies add a whole new dimension—teachers must continue to seek and find innovative and efficient ways to resolve ongoing issues about the writing classroom at all instructional levels. We are looking for fresh, original descriptions and accounts of teachers' "new and improved" ways of handling the paper—and electronic—load.

Your essay may explore questions such as these: \*How do you evaluate students' papers? What aspects of students' writing do you focus on? \*What kinds of feedback do you give? \*How has technology changed your handling of the paper load? \*How do you handle the electronic load? \*What strategies and solutions have you found to monitor and evaluate students' online work frequently and efficiently? \*How

do you cope with the paper/electronic load resulting from journal writing? Research papers? \*How do you evaluate student projects and performances that incorporate writing?

**Length of submission:** 4-10 double-spaced pages; **Contact information:** Please include a cover sheet that contains your name, postal address, telephone number, school/institution, and e-mail address. **Deadline: December 1, 2003.** For more details, please visit our Web site at [www.ncte.org/books/paperload.shtml](http://www.ncte.org/books/paperload.shtml).

**Send submissions to:**

Dr. Jeffrey N. Golub  
Department of Secondary Education EDU162,  
University of South Florida  
4202 E. Fowler Ave., Tampa, FL 33620  
E-mail: [golub54@aol.com](mailto:golub54@aol.com)